



BURMESE POT-POURRI

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BURMESE POT-POURRI
BEING
A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS ON
MODERN BURMESE NOVELS
(PRE-WAR)
AND
OTHER SKETCHES

By
MAUNG MAUNG PYE



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A pyo-bawa by **Mya Myo Lwin**
 (P y i n y u n y a t a n a, P r e s s M a n d a l a y)

THIS book is a great advance on "Sayama", which is popularly acclaimed as Mya Myo Lwin's best work. The book, presumably a reply to "Sayama", excels it in many respects. The psychology is more credible and the author's pleasant and convincingly vivid style is read at its best. Mya Myo Lwin's characters are full-blooded creatures and their prototypes are easily found in many of the people living in Burma to-day. There is a fine touch of realism in his works, which has often resulted in the author being accused of building his stories from the material of living romances.

This is a dexterously told story of a girl who has just joined the Intermediate College. She boards with a few lady teachers and finds it hard to have to depend entirely on her parents. She comes across an advertisement which calls for a private tutor and applying for it, she finds herself accepted. Her employer, she discovers, is a young man, but her work is to teach a little of seven who immediately becomes attached to her. The little girl is regarded as the daughter of the young man who gives the heroine the impression of being a widower. Her attachment for her little pupil steadily grows more profound, while Cupid seems to have worked assiduously for the employer and the heroine. R.L.S tells us that love is too dangerous to be regarded as a domestic sentiment and the heroine, Nyun Nyun, believes it is folly to marry a widower. She attempts to

leave, but her little pupil invariably prevents her. At last, casting aside sentimental thought, she bids farewell to her employer and the child and returns to her town where she becomes the one desire and passion of all the eligible bachelors. She realises that she loves Maung Pe Than, her former employer, but his being a widower raises an insurmountable barrier against her conscience. Her parents arrange a match for her with a young forest officer whom she consents to marry, to please them. Her heart yearns for her employer and the child, and when she hears that the child is lying critically ill and wishes to see her, her heart prompts her to go, but her conscience forbids. Meanwhile, Pe Than seeks her out and pleads with her to go and see the dying child. But, before they reach the house, the little girl dies and Nyun Nyun learns too late that her employer is a genuine bachelor and that the dead child was his niece. He declares his love for her, but she cannot accept it since she is to be married to another.

The story is realistic and convincing enough but I wish it had ended on a happier note. The little child is most charmingly drawn and reminds me, when she is on her death-bed, of Little Nell. But the author does not indulge too often in soft sentimentality, and the story has many bright moments.

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Sawya-Vutthu by Kwet Soke
(The Sun Press Ltd.)
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THIS is a novel which satisfies and sustains us with its breadth of vision and observation

of contemporary life. The title is apt to mislead us for it suggests a detective story since the title when translated means 'thief.' However, the story has very little to do with thieves, though they do play a minor role in the story. There is a strong element of pathos which runs like an unbroken thread throughout the story, but the central theme is a woman's fidelity, courage and magnanimity. Ma Mya Lay is in her early twenties and is proud of her looks and status in life. She is the young wife of an Inspector of Police, a drunkard and a debauchee to boot. Her brother U Po Yin, a wealthy mill-owner and his wife Ma Than Kyi are happy with their two-year old son. But the action starts with the Inspector and his wife setting out for Mandalay, by river. Their steamer is involved in an accident, and the drunken husband to save his own skin jumps overboard and disappears. His wife is left to her own fate, but she finds a gallant rescuer in a young man, a pleader, who happens to be on the same boat. He rescues her and takes her back to his home where she recovers and awakens to the probability of a happier life with her benefactor. She returns the love of the young pleader and she returns home where she tells her brother of the accident, the tragic death of her husband and the kindness of her rescuer. The brother quite innocently asks the benefactor to visit them, and meanwhile a letter addressed to Ma Than Kyi arrives. The addressee opens the letter and to her surprise, she finds that it is a love letter for her sister-in-law. Enraged, she goes to the sister-in-law and reprimands her, but the latter confides in her the secret affair

with the pleader. Inspired by a quixotic magnanimity she vows to shield her sister-in-law, and when the pleader visits them she leaves the two lovers together. Her husband is quite oblivious of his sister's clandestine affair and his wife fixes a day for the formal marriage of her sister-in-law. But when it is only a few days before the wedding, the lost Inspector turns up with dramatic suddenness much to the surprise of the miller and disappointment to the guilty party. His wife feigns indisposition and is reluctant to accompany him to Mandalay where he is just posted. When the Inspector returns, the miller's wife with the courage born of despair goes to see the pleader to plead with him to sever his connection with her sister-in-law. Her husband returns home unexpectedly and finds her away. He is surprised at his wife's strange behaviour for she has never yet left the house in his absence. Suspicion begins to gnaw at his heart and when he intercepts a last love letter addressed to his wife he flares up but he prefers to suffer in silence rather than accuse his wife directly. His wife shrewdly enough knows that her husband's heart is poisoned against her but she still refuses to make a clean breast of the whole affair. Her husband begins to regard his own son as illegitimate and when dacoits raid his home he gives all that the dacoits ask together with his own son. So we leave them here.

How this boy is initiated into the mysteries of the light-fingered gentry, what sufferings he has to undergo, and what untold heartaches and

troubles the poor but foolishly courageous woman suffers makes interesting reading.

The story is poignantly human and life-like in all its details and incidentally reflects the superficialities of contemporary life.

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MyIntha-Mar Maung Hmya by **Khin Hla Gyi**
 (Kawi Myet-Hman Press, 25th Street, Rangoon.)

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THREE is originality as well as pictorial imagery in this story of horse-racing and gambling. The author's narrative power is well displayed but the didactic purpose of the whole story runs through it.

The author's insight into the subtler workings of the human mind, and the creation of a hero who deserves both our pity and admiration are the most noteworthy features of this unusual, but realistic story.

The tale opens with the arrival at a quiet Sa-gaing monastery of a man. His appearance itself reveals that he has fallen on evil days and his threadbare jacket and worn-out "goung boung" only accentuate his penury. The phon-gyi who seems to have been expecting him welcomes him and murmurs soothing words. But the man grovels at his feet and means pitifully. He is apparently repentant of a past folly and is determined to amend his wrong-doing by taking refuge in prolonged fasting and meditation.

The donor of the monastery is a wealthy old lady who has just lost her son, but she has a clever and comely daughter who manages her

business affairs. This old lady and her daughter arrive at the monastery where they meet the hero whom the phongyi calls Kywet-ni. The extraordinary likeness between this stranger and her deceased son happens to be the open sesame to the old lady's heart, and she becomes attached to the stranger. The old lady's attachment matures quickly and she is bent on inviting the stranger to her house. Things happen as she wishes and through the phongyi who is the stranger's uncle, she receives Kywet-ni as an honoured guest. But the stranger is ill at ease and he thinks of leaving the house. The old lady, however, openly declares that his departure will mean a broken heart, and she thinks of the best means of keeping her protege forever near her. There is only one way of accomplishing this and that is to give her daughter in marriage to the stranger. She talks it over with her daughter who seeing the blind attachment of her old mother for the stranger agrees to fall in with her plan. Then she next approaches the stranger who is more than surprised at this bold plan, but he asks time to think it over. Here we get a glimpse of his character, and he endears himself to us. He is a man with a terrible past and his conscience is restless, for he knows that his prospective mother-in-law will never think of him as her son-in-law if his past is told. But he bares his heart one night, and relates his story.

He was a cashier in a big mercantile firm and his business integrity and honestly won the trust and confidence of his manager. He was a married man with a child, and through the persuasion of a neighbour, a gambler, he began

to taste, at first, the joys of his first winnings on the Turf. But he had been too far gone with lust and avarice, and to cut the story short, he became an inveterate gambler lured on by the will-o'-the-wisp of possible winnings. He indulged in bigger stakes until finally he had to stake his reputation and honesty. He used the company's money which he lost irretrievably and when things came to light, his career ended in rigorous imprisonment. A victim to his own folly he tasted not only the bitterness of gambling but of life itself.

During his imprisonment he lost his wife and child and when he was released on parole he sought refuge in a religious life. He reveals himself as the foolish gambler, Maung Hmya, and the surprised old lady can scarcely believe it all.

The climax is interesting and the reader will, undoubtedly, enjoy it. The story ends with a moral in verse.

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M y o-o k L a u n g b y S h w e - N y a - M a u n g,
(Shwe Daung Nyo, Novel Co., Rangoon.)

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THIS book is presumably a diatribe against those young men who come to Rangoon from the districts evidently to pursue a course of studies but in reality to squander their parents' money.

The hero Mg. Mg. Myint is well portrayed and, we are more or less familiar with such type. He is the pampered son of rich parents in a

district town. The father is too indulgent and when the son conceives an infatuation for a penniless young street-seller, he has not the heart to prevent his son from marrying the girl. The hero lives an idle life with his wife, but there comes a day when he suddenly decides to continue his studies in Rangoon. The old dotard of a father falls in with his plan and we find him in Rangoon to all intents and purpose studying very hard. He then falls into bad company and tastes more of the pleasures of city life. He meets a half-caste waitress at one of the well-known Chinese hotels and falls headlong in love with the girl. But simple and unsophisticated as he really is, he naturally falls an easy prey to the wanton waitress. She fleeces him cleverly and his old father bears the brunt of his foolishness. He has almost forgotten the existence of his wife and child, but he returns home to persuade his father to provide him with a more substantial allowance. He fools the old man into thinking that he has been very successful in his studies and delights him by suggesting that it would be better if he passed the Subordinate Civil Service and became a Myo-ok.

The wastrel returns to Rangoon with a substantial sum of money which he squanders on the waitress and on books which he can scarcely read or understand. The waitress leaves him for another man, but he does not realise how foolish he has been. He boards and lodges at the home of a respectable old lady who has two other boarders one of whom is secretly preparing for the Subordinate Civil Service Examination. The hero gives the impression that he is

also preparing for the Examination, and he impresses the landlady as well as a beautiful girl and her mother with his expensive clothes and his extravagant ways. He falls in love with the young girl who is also loved by the studious young boarder living with the hero. The father keeps on sending the amount asked for by his spendthrift son, until he finds himself involved in debt. But the son is kept in ignorance of his father's plight, thought his wife writes to tell him about the real state of affairs. The letter is intercepted by his fellow boarders who come to know the bare facts about the showy young man.

When the time comes for him to sit for the Examination the hero makes a show of his appearing to sit for the Examination and when it is over he returns home to learn from his wife the real position of the over-indulgent father, who is ill and now heavily in debt. The hero immediately returns to Rangoon where he tries to get married to the beautiful girl who is his neighbour. But her mother who, by now, has come to know him too well, flatly refuses and drives him out, and the girl marries the young boarder who has passed his Examination.

Meanwhile the father dies, and when the hero returns he finds that his wife has left him for another and that he is more or less penniless and stranded. The victim of his own folly, the realisation of his sins rush through him like a pent up flood and he goes mad.

What a story and what an ending !

Kawe-Saya-Mhat-Tan by Yaw Saya Gyi

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AFTER reading U Po Kya's book on the thirty-seven nats or spirits this strange tale of man's defiance of a powerful nat spirit is very interesting. We have often heard of the existence of certain spirits who, apparently, have hereditary influence over some people and even to-day, when the more radical among us are striving to uproot the deeprooted superstition of the more conservative folk, there remains in us a gnawing doubt of the reality or an abiding faith in the influence of these spirits over our lives. The Burman, by temperament and instinct is an optimist and any incident which threatens to ruffle the even tenour of his life is attributed to his Karma, and, among the more superstitious, to the evil influence of the family spirits. It is the custom of most Burmans to propitiate these family spirits at least twice a year, once at the beginning of the Buddhist Lent and again at the end of the Lent. Personally, I have come across many striking incidents which amply prove the reality of the influence of these spirits, who are evidently, endowed with the power for evil rather than any good, on their believers. But then : "There are more things in Heaven and Earth,

Than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

In my search for the truth of the existence of such spirits, I have made acquaintances with mediums and those people connected with the hereditary family spirits. In this book we are told the very strange tale of the struggle of a

wizard against the influence of a spirit. It makes absorbing reading. There is plenty of incidents and excitement and from the beginning to the end the weird incidents hold our undivided interest. I am not wholly convinced of the reality of such facts, but I, presume, it is fiction based on certain facts, no doubt, distorted or exaggerated, and those readers who have had enough of sentimental novels will find in this book a story which recreates and refreshes and at the same time helps imperceptibly to strengthen the belief in these spirits.

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Doh-May-May by Maha Swe (The Sun Press, Ltd.)

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THIS is a book by a novelist and writer whose name is familiar to all readers of Burmese fiction. Maha Swe is a writer with that rare gift of being both entertaining and captivating to his readers. In this book he gives us a consummate blend of the humour and the pathos of life and, though the tragic note is rarely absent in the whole story, yet the author has wisely provided safety-valves for our emotion. The author's sympathetic view of life and his deep insight into the minds of people; young or old, play like a lambent effulgence over his characters, for he bares the soul of his characters under the searchlight of his understanding.

Khin Saw Oo, the pampered daughter of an indulgent father, who is a person of rank in the Shan States, is sent to Rangoon University. The worldly-wise but dotard of a father jealously

ensures means of keeping her young life unpolluted. But "stone walls do not a prison make" to a modern girl and the caged bird is not destined long to remain in "single blessedness." Maung Myo Nyun, the fifth son of a wealthy man, happens to be in college too and he meets her—with disastrous consequences. He falls in love with her and, with the help of a girl friend who masquerades as an Anglo-Indian girl, he gains access to the girl's home and her heart too. Meanwhile tragedy has stalked his family and the first blow falls when the hero's father is foully poisoned and robbed of his wealth by an erstwhile friend. The murderer, U Win, is a most unscrupulous villain, but when he marries the widow of his murdered friend things begin to take a different turn. He has two sons of his own, and to these he offers a part of his ill-gotten property.

The greatest obstacle to the husband is the youngest son. The husband tries poisoning, then hires assailants, and even places a viper near the young man who fortunately escapes these several deaths but when the husband resorts to breaking the heart of the young man by creating a false impression upon the sweetheart he succeeds to some extent. The girl at the instigation of the villain accuses her lover of being a heart-breaker and an unprincipled home-wrecker and she cuts him off without so much as a kiss. The young man feels the injustice of it all as he recognises it as the sequence to his step-father's machinations. The hero and one of his loving brothers are driven away from home and these two live a miserable life for some time,

eking out a precarious living by vending betel leaves and other trifles. The girl sees her beloved one day—shabby and miserable—but the poison of hatred administered by the villain still rankles in her breast and she scorns him. At last, however, understanding dawns on her she repents and women-like she defies ! her father and every one else and goes to meet her lover in his lowly abode. The course of their true love is as rough as the proverb has it but with happiness at stake they both go through hell until they manage to pilot their storm-tossed bark into the heavenly harbour of parental acquiescence.

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Zut-Zwe by Manng Lay Maung

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Does money really matter in this world ? From the novel "Zut-Zwe" By Mg. Lay Mg. we learn that it does matter. Dr. Doudney tells us that, "money never made a man happy yet ; nor will it. There is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more a man has the more he wants. Instead of its filling a vacuum it makes one. If it satisfies one want, it doubles and trebles that want another way." The author indulges in a mild satire and shows us how vain people really can be at times. The story concerns a boy and girl who grow up as neighbours, playmates, and friends. But as lovers they fail, because the hero's prospective parents-in-law choose a man of means as their son-in-law. The love between the hero and heroine is pure and undiluted, and when his love gets trampled the hero turns

a misogynist. To understand this sudden change we may refer to Balzac again. He says that, "Love and hate are sentiments which feed upon themselves; but of the two hate is the longer-lived. Love is circumstanced by its limited forces, it derives its power from life and prodigality; hate resembles death, or avarice—it is in a certain sense an active abstraction above beings and things." But the hero turns a lover again when he meets another girl in Rangoon where he has come to forget his first love, after amassing wealth in Upper Burma. He finally finds peace and happiness with the second object of his love. This novel is well-written and the characters are very much alive. The author thought living, to use a Johnsonian phrase, "in cold obscurity," has a great future.

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Ta-Hnar-Mee by Tat Tun

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MAUNG Tun We and Maung Ba Khine are school mates but they were born under different stars. The former, though poor, wins the love of the girl, while the latter with his wealth wins only the approval of the parents.

When Ba Khine realises that the girl is lost to him he becomes desperate, but he has behind him the girl's parents whom he overwheims with his offers of monetary help and his promise to lay his whole fortune at the disposal of the girl and her parents. He makes love to the girl in vain for she is too loyal to her lover. He waylays her and presses his suit once again. When

pleadings fail he tries intimidation, yet he is defied. The love he has cherished for her now gives birth to a suffused passion that can have only one ending. He stabs her and turns the weapon upon himself in sight of Tun We who has come too late. The blood-stained bodies shock him but the sight of his beloved in a pool of blood sets loose a terrible flood of pity for her in his heart. In agony he carries the girl back to the village where the villagers run out to meet him, but he runs amock with a blood-stained dagger and raves like a madman. One of his uncles, mistaking him for a homicidal maniac, shoots him—and so the trio of lovers passes into eternity.

But wait ; the story goes on and we are taken to Rangoon after a lapse of some time. The trio come into the world again and enact the same drama. This is what every pious Buddhist thinks and this is what we now read. The two rivals are born as twins and the girl as a beautiful maiden who is loved by the elder brother. But Fate intervenes when the younger brother is mistaken by the girl for his brother, with whom she has appointed a tryst at a quiet spot. The girl greets the pseudo-lover charmingly, and the warm-natured young man responds. Transported with the delirium of ecstasy in having a beautiful girl in his company the young man really falls in love with her.

How true are these lines from Matthew Arnold when he says :—“We are like swimmers in the sea, poised on the huge wave of Fate.” For the young man unconsciously sets the stage for a grim drama. The elder brother arrives to keep

tryst, but what he sees before him leaves him aghast. He loves his younger brother and he is shocked by the apparent duplicity of his beloved. He returns home and ends his life with his own hands and leaves a long letter to his brother to explain his action.

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Mainma-Hnah-Yan by Tatkatho Mya-Kan-Tu



THE hero Mg Than Myint, is a young officer who is infatuated with Mi Mi Gyi, an ultra-modernised daughter of well-to-do parents. There is some sort of understanding between them that they are to be married, but the hero doubts if her parents will give their formal consent since she is engaged to another, a wealthy man. But these thoughts do not deter them from their daily round of pleasure, and at a function where the guests are entertained by an anyein pwe, Mi Mi Gyi overhears the leading actress, Khin Mya Yee complaining to her chaperone of her miserable lot, since the life of an actress, she feels, is not fated for her. The lovers return home and they decide to meet at a cinema and contract a secret marriage. But subsequently Mi Mi Gyi has little or no love for the hero and she strikes me more as a vamp than anything else.

The hero, one misty morning, leaves for Pegu and on the way his car skids, collides with a tree and he is taken unconscious to the Pegu Hospital. He suffers from injuries to his head and eyes, but recovers gradually. All his thoughts now

centre upon Mi Mi Gyi. He thinks of his promise to meet her at the cinema and he cannot think of making her his wife, being convinced that he is blind. The doctors give him encouragement and tell him that his sight will be restored in a few months, but he is sceptical. He returns home in time to meet Mi Mi Gyi who, on learning of the accident and his blindness from the papers does not care for him any more, and she confesses she can never be the wife of a blind man with his job at stake.

But the hero, blissfully ignorant of the duplicity of his beloved writes a letter to Mi Mi Gyi asking only her love and sympathy and inviting her to come and nurse him. This is too much for the vamp and she enlists the services of the beautiful, actress to impersonate her and nurse the hero back to health. This is really too good for the poor actress to believe, but the girl does as she is bidden. She is met at the cinema by the hero's servant, who respectfully takes her to his master's house where the hero welcomes her taking her to be Mi Mi Gyi. The actress, a delightful character, realises the dangerous part she is playing and her noble heart prompts her to leave the house before it is too late. "Pity," as Balzac says, "is the source of concupiscence," and it is pity that makes her decide to nurse this helpless man. Her unbounded pity for the hero begets love, deep and abiding, and she nurses him with all her tender care and love. The hero, blind and helpless, loves his nurse whom he takes for Mi Mi Gyi and his lips often murmur words of gratitude and repayment. But the young actress, who has now become a mother, finds it hard to deceive him any longer.

One day, in her absence, the hero tries to prepare his own toilet, but he slips and falls down a flight of steps. The shock partially restores his sight, and when his sweetheart returns he is surprised that she is not Mi Mi Gyi. But he is grateful to his nurse and while pretending he cannot see her, he decides to go through thick and thin with her. He knows that his nurse cares for him and that the vamp has been leading a most despicable life. When this dissolute woman hears of his convalescence and his proposed trip to Calcutta for further treatment, she visits the hero's house and drives away the loyal actress, branding her as a hired wife. But the girl, who has come to love her husband more than her life, cannot leave without seeing him. The vamp turns her out most cruelly, and when the hero returns she tries to fool him into thinking that it was she who had nursed him all the time. But thanks to the providential restoration of his sight after his fall, he divines the real intentions of the vamp and in his anger openly spurns her and drives her out of his house.

The hero searches for his missing sweetheart, and in desperation he comes to the Lakes where he intends committing suicide. The cries of a distressed girl, however, attract him, and he rescues her from the attack of some ruffians. Thus the hero meets his sweetheart! But she is reluctant to go back, since she considers herself an unsuitable wife for him.

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Takulat-Talingwa by P. Monin

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BA Tin, the hero of the novel is depicted as a kind of beloved vagabond or euphemistically a knight of the road earning his precarious living by his wit and helped by his companion Sannasay, an Indian waif. What a strange companionship! But we must not forget that adversity acquaints us with strange bed-fellows. U Aung Nyein, a rich businessman gets stranded on a deserted road, his car stopping for unknown reasons to his drink-befogged brain. But Ba Tin, evidently a jack of all trades, helps him go home, by attending to the cause of the trouble. U Aung Nyein is a grateful man and he does not forget the young vagabond who does him another good turn by restoring to him the lost bag of money his flippant and young wife took with her in her attempt to run away from him. The girl Ma Hla Mya, though married to a wealthy man does not find happiness, and as a last resource she tries to drown herself. But Fate intervenes and the hero, Ba Tin, again comes to the rescue and takes her home unaware that she is his benefactor's wife. When she recovers consciousness she feigns ignorance of all that has happened and deliberately tells her young rescuer that she is unmarried. On the strength of it, the hero's love for her grows all the stronger with the inevitable result that they unconsciously drift into a state of illicit relation. But Ba Tin, meets his benefactor and learns from him that his wife deserted him. A photograph is shown, and Ba Tin at once recognizes in the girl he has rescued his benefactor's wife. He nobly opens

the door of reconciliation by taking his friend to his house. Ma Hla May readily goes back with her husband and they live happily for some time when her condition forms an obstacle. She discovers that that she is to become a mother and Ba Tin learning the news in a flood of joy and apprehension offers to take her away. But she, knowing well that since she had no children with her husband after years of married life, scoffs at the impertinence and remains. The husband gets suspicious and becomes indifferent to her. When the child is born, Ba Tin, his superethical love for the child which he believes is his own coming to the fore, enters the house stealthily and embraces his child. But the infuriated husband surprises him and in a fit of uncontrollable anger shoots at his wife and Ba Tin and turns the weapon on himself with fatal results. Ba Tin and his wife survive him and they, coming in for his wealth live happily. The story has been told at length, to show the dramatic situations in which it abounds, and the skill with which the author works up his story to the climax. The hero, Ba Tin is the type of Paragot of Locke's "Beloved Vagabond." He is honest, conscientious and straight as a die, and like Paragot he has transcendental contempt for money and believes that, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." The heroine, Ma Hla May is passionate, irresponsible and a first class flapper. But we may understand her better if we can agree with Balzac when he tells us that, "Passion exalts a woman's nervous force to that ecstatic state wherein presentiment is equivalent to the second sight of seers."

Ho ! Ho ! Laik Malar Saya



IT was a fine morning in ideal weather just before a deluge. The streets were as crowded as ever. The sound of motor buses dashing along the streets, accompanied by shouts of "Tamwe, Kyaukmyaung, Kemmendine, San-chuang" rent the air.

I had to go to Kemmendine and I waited for a decent looking bus that was not too crowded and from which no "spareman" would do a back somersault and seize me by the hand half persuasively and half forcibly, reaching for my hat and offering to carry it for me.

I was already late for my appointment, and I said to myself that I would take the first available bus. One came along and pulled up with a sharp squeal of hastily applied brakes. The spareman (may his tribe decrease !) jumped off and invited more passengers to enter, declaring solemnly that there was "plenty of room."

I looked at the bus and my heart sank within me. It was uncomfortably packed. Not wishing to lose time, however I put my foot on the foot-board at the rear. No sooner had I done this than the bus began to move at the spareman's cry of "Kho-lo." As the bus gathered speed I found myself clinging to it for dear life. I could neither get off nor get into the bus. The spareman put his arm around me, more to keep me from jumping off than to protect me, and assured me that all would be well round the corner. A fat man sitting on a low stool absolutely out of proportion to his bulk blocked the entrance to

the bus. Inside the bus a middle-aged woman passenger was protesting violently against the outrageous behaviour of a Chinaman who on being asked by the spareman to "push up" found himself sitting on her lap. The driver was indifferent to the lot of the passengers, and the spareman cared two hoots for the comfort of his victims. I was still hanging on to the bus, with the spareman still inviting passengers in. When we reached the Sooratee Bazaar about half of the passengers left the bus. At long last I secured a seat. I heaved a sigh of relief and stretched my cramped legs. Once again the spareman was busy inviting more passengers, but fortunately only a few accepted the challenge. The bus then began to move.

We were quite a cosmopolitan crowd in it. There was a Telegu, sporting a raffish shirt and "dhoti", and a red flower stock in his ear. Next to him sat a reserved-looking Chinaman probably a stranger to *hangoon*, and then a Bengali holding a leather bag, who gave me the impression of being a broker or an insurance agent.

A Madrasi and a Burman, both presumably having looked upon the wine when it was red, were engaged in a heated discussion of something which I presumed was of a controversial nature. The Burman pulled out some money and the Indian followed suit. Evidently a stake was being put up. The Bengali gentleman who sat next to them found himself interested in the discussion and he acted as judge. While the argument waxed louder the driver who was humming a popular song-hit while driving at a steady

forty-five stopped short, turned round to the passengers and said: "For Heaven's sake, why can't you keep quiet and let a fellow drive in peace?"

Just then the spareman shouted out "HO, ho", jumped off the bus and dragged into the bus a frightened-looking woman with a big basket on her head. The spareman pushed the basket after the woman. But it was too much for the reserved Celestial sitting near the corner. Up to that time he had accepted life with the passivity of his race. The basket was the last straw.

"What is this?", he demanded indignantly. "Where am I supposed to put my legs?"

"Inside the basket", was the laconic reply of the unconcerned spareman.

"How dare you do it?" exclaimed the woman, staring at the Chinese; "the cheek of it!"

Then she sent a mouthful of betel juice out of the window of the bus which at that moment swerved to avoid a dog. The stream of betel juice descended on the Bengali and the two controversialists.

"Hey, hey, look and do it," shouted the two debaters in unison, "look what you have done to our new shirts."

The Bengali gentleman turned to me and said: "What, mister such odious misdemeanour should be eradicated from the country. Look at my snow-white shirt. It is ruined and here I am going in pursuance of an important manipulation."

"Ho! ho! Laik Malar saya" seconded the spareman with callous nonchalance.

THE LATE SAYA P. MONIN

An Appreciation

* * * * *

“**T**HEY told me, Heraclitus, they told me
you were dead, they brought me bitter
news to hear and bitter tears to shed.

I wept as I remembered how often you and I
had tired the sun with talking, and sent him down
the sky.”

My mind went back to that touching lament
of the poet Callinachus on the death of his
friend, Heraclitus. I need not say what a
profound loss the death of P. Monin has been to
Burmese writers.

I once read out to him the following passage
from W.J. Locke's “Beloved Vagabond”.

“What I resent about it, is that one is not
able to have any personal concern in the most
interesting event in one's career. If you could
even follow your own funeral and have a chance
of weeping for yourself. You are never so
important as when you are a corpse—and you
miss it all. I have a good mind not to die. It is
either the silliest or the wisest action of one's life;
I wonder which.”

He burst out laughing but he became serious
again and asked me in his kindly manner what
I personally thought about It.

He was then recovering from an attack of pa-
ralysis. I told him I heartily agreed with Paragot
that one is never so important as when one is a
corpse and one misses it all. It was then that
he became reminiscent and told me of his frust-

rated hopes and ambition as a writer who had to eke out a precarious living by his pen. He added whimsically that he'd hate to die before he could do something for his country. He was in favour of writing as a hobby or an avocation but certainly not as a means of livelihood. He was often outspoken in his views but then he was a realist of the first water and P. Monin the realist often overwhelmed P. Monin the artist and author. He felt that Burmese politics was deteriorating and was leading nowhere. As a realist he believed more in constructive work than in bandying words.

He had H.G. Wells' intellectual force, G.B.S' attribute of an intellectual irritant and Chesterton's reliance on forceful expression of his views. When Bo Aung Gyaw died he told some people that the young student was worth more than all the Politicians put together ; and on another occasion he wrote in his " Lay Pway " column that young writers were merely wasting ink and paper.

No one could take offence at such outspokenness because every one felt that it was P. Monin the realist speaking and it acted like an intellectual irritant. He made a deep study of psychology and had written many books of psychological interest. Limits of space forbid me to deal in detail with all his works but I shall confine myself to only three of his works which have appealed to me tremendously.

One of his earliest works is " Nay-Yee-Yee " in which he displays his artistic skill and power of characterisation which I have sought for in vain

in his later works. It is in this book that one finds, in Lowell's happy expression, "Understanding aerated by imagination."

Then in his "Myochit-Seit" we catch a glimpse of his political thought and creed. In his translation of Dumas' "Three Musketeers" which I consider more an adaptation than a translation, his creative force overwhelms his work. He is carried away by his own emotional feelings and the result is a very good Burmese equivalent of "The Three Musketeers."

In all his works, a force and beauty which reveal the perfect literary artist are to be found in abundance.

The trouble with most of the present-day Burmese writers is that they are either tremendously progressive or tremendously reactionary. P. Monin was neither. He preferred to remain a realist and the result is that his works lack humour of the type that we find in Leacock, Wodehouse or Jacobs. His attitude to life is best summed up in G. B. S' own apologia:—

"I am of opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can !

And his sorrowing friends and Chelas will say of him that :—

"Of perfect service rendered, duties done
In charity, soft speech, and stainless days:
These riches shall not fade away in life;
Nor any death dispraise".

NAYPYIDAW REVISITED BEFORE THE WAR

:O:

TO an Anyatha, Naypyidaw is the euphuistic term for Mandalay. Ah, Naypyidaw! what memories it brings back to me. How I have often longed to return to it, the scene of my happy childhood and the cradle of all my shattered dreams and hopes. So one day, I found myself on the train bound for Naypyidaw, and as the train sped through a country full of dry paddy fields on either side, the regular rhythmic rattling of the train made me dream dreams and think thoughts. I felt like Odysseus returning to Ithaca, but in my case Mandalay was my Penelope waiting to receive me, and I thought that like Rip Van Winkle I was returning to my Naypyidaw to see things improved beyond my wildest imagination.

What the white cliffs of Dover are to a home-returning Englishman, or the Statue of Liberty to a roving Yankee, so was the first sight of the MahaMuni Pagoda at Mandalay resplendent in the blazing sun to me, returning to Mandalay after an absence of a decade or so. Mandalay, the soul of Burma! The bounds that tie me to her are, perhaps, gone, but Mandalay, with all her dust and filth, still occupies a sacred spot somewhere in the soft part of my heart. The hard knocks that I have received in life have not been able to knock out my sentiments for my native town.

I have often heard adverse comments on Mandalay made by some of my "Auk-tha" friends. The dust and the heat, the extreme cold in winter and the scorching heat in the dry weather season, and the ravages of epidemics, no wonder, Mandalay has a desolate appearance.

I started out to see Mandalay very much changed and improved, but I was disappointed. It was the selfsame town I left years back to go roving to strange climes beyond the sea. The same scenes of my childhood pranks and my catapulting campaigns against innocent chameleons in our garden, or playing at hunting in the shrubs near the Royal Palace, with my little Disney air gun. All these came back to me vividly as I surveyed them.

The old Royal Palace still stands there, with symptoms of the ravages of time and disuse clearly printed on it. The blue Shan Mountains that form an impressive background, and the Mandalay Hill that still stands like a lone sentinel are there.

“Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye.”

From the summit of Mandalay Hill I looked down on the deserted palace, and the city without the walls of the palace. On my way down the hill, I passed the strange image of an ogress with only one breast offering flowers before a shrine. I began to search in the archives of my memory what this meant and then I remembered the story of the Hill. It would seem that when Lord Buddha paid a visit to Burma he stood on the spur of a hill which is now the Mandalay Hill, and there he met an ogress, who in adoration of the Lord, cut off one of her breasts and offered it to the Lord. Then Lord Buddha predicted that a great city would be founded on the plain below the hill, and that the ogress would be one of its founders in her next existence.

Thus it came to pass that Mandalay was founded, and in conformity with a saying that "If your life you would prolong, in the shadow of the Mandalay Hill take refuge," some earth was brought from the Man Valley and a city was built in the shadow of the Mandalay Hill. On my way to the town I had to pass through the palace yards. But the old palace seemed to beckon me in. No sooner do I enter its precincts than eddies of past memories come rolling down the mists of time and I am borne away into the past.

The King sat on his golden Lion Throne, in audience, and discussing matters of state. He seemed to be uneasy and excited. A hoary Minister, with upraised hands was explaining something to the King, and yet the King sat on the throne lost in his own thoughts.

Curiously enough it was the 28th November when I stood in the audience hall of the palace. Wasn't it the same day when General Prendergast entered Mandalay and took away the King and Queen?

But to be accurate, the King was not taken away from the audience hall. He was, some say, taken away from his summer pavilion in his gardens. Once more I drifted into dreamland. I could hear the steady "Tramp, Tramp" of the British Red Coats. Excitement ran high in the palace. News of the arrival of the Kalas had gone round and speculation was rife.

But, by now I had shaken myself from my reverie, and I strode through dusty and deserted apartments that have now become the habitat of bats and mice. Oh, where have, "The boast

of heraldry, and the pomp of power gone?" I thought I could hear the subdued whispers of the courtiers, the gay cackle of palace maidens, the soft rustle of silk and the clang and rattle of swords and arms that spoke of battles long ago. I leave the palace to the bats and the mice and I tear myself away from it to visit our old paternal home. I stop at its entrance and it seems to invite me in, and acting under a strange impulse I enter the compound. Here is the very place we played so happily at hide and seek, and there the rooms we romped about. On the huge walls of the house are the initials of ourselves so crudely engraved and yet defying old Father Time. These walls no more echo the joyous cries of care-free children. In the garden, the trees that we planted are no more bullied by those small hands that gave them life. Tears trickle down my cheeks as I stood alone, a stranger in my own home. But as a good Buddhist, I console myself with the law of impermanence, "Anaiksa Wara Thinkhara."

The next day I found myself at the Sagaing Hills, the sanctuary of those who suffer intensely from, "this strange disease of modern life". I paid my homage to the presiding phongyi of the monastery we had built and then went sightseeing. But in all the places I passed the atmosphere of pious dullness was stifling. Phongyis chanting the Lord's prayer, sedate looking nuns with rosaries in their hands sitting in meditation under a shady tree were not meant for me. Here and there I came across some young nuns whose shaven heads could not hide the beauty that was in their faces. Why had these young people

taken refuge here? Could they live on in such a state for an indefinite period? Had they no more of the common feelings of young women of their kind? Such questions occupied my mind as I stopped to watch them sedately go about their duties. But my contact with them had not been in vain. Because, "To them I may have owed another gift, of aspect more sublime." From the uncongenial atmosphere I returned to my zayat and from it I enjoyed an excellent view of the Irrawaddy, flowing serenely along. Now and then little sampans passed carrying a few yellow-robed phongyis or some saffron-clad nuns returning from Mandalay and the little steam launches saucily ploughing along the river greeted me with the sound of their sirens. Overcome with a strange sadness I meditate on the flowing river below me. While we sweat and strain this "Ole Man River" he just flows along, and he is oblivious of time and fate and the little joys and sorrows of mankind.

But I shall not forget the morning when I stood on the hill to watch the sun coming up. The birds twittering in the trees, the sight of phongyis returning from their rounds with their bowls in their hands, and the scene spread below me are all so sad, so fresh, that reminds me of the days that are no more.

Heralded by the gentle tinkling of the pagoda bells and chanting of prayers by some nuns near the pagoda, the sun appears.

"Rise, Great Sun!"

And lift my leaf and mix me with the wave
 O M M A N I P A D M E H U M, the
 sunrise comes!"

THE SACRED RUBIES
* * * *

WE were stationed at Gwegyaung on the Madaya River, in the Mandalay District. To our east we could discern the great misty mountains and deep forests which formed a natural barrier between Burma proper and the Shan States, and around us stood shaggy hills.

We were engaged in felling the marked trees in that area and in rafting and floating the logs down the river. The monsoon had just set in and the river was swelling. The forests and glades in which we had made our home began to put on a greener and fresher garb, while dense clouds that hovered above us shut out the sun from our view. Food was scarce and we lived on rice and whatever game we could procure in the forests. Malaria was rife and most of our men were down with it. At night a great fire lit around our camp kept away the denizens of the forest and incidentally kept us warm. In the day, the cold wind that beat down upon our sweating bodies made us shiver with cold but our tedious and laborious work accustomed us to the damp weather. Our elephants were working at a feverish pace and our men were determined to finish the work before the rains had set in earnest.

One night, as I retired to my tent and made to lie down on my camp cot, the chief mahout came to me and reported the loss of one of our elephants. It had apparently strayed away but it did not occur to my mind how it could possibly stray away after a day's hard work. It was, of course, a serious thing to lose one of our working elephants. There was heavy work in store

for us and the five elephants we had with us were working at high pressure. I offered to go out in search of the missing elephant and, I called for volunteers. Two men offered to accompany me. They were fine specimens of Burmese manhood but very superstitious. They attributed the loss of the elephant to the trick played by some irate deity whose wrath we had in some inexplicable way incurred. However, they offered to accompany me and to assist me in my search for the missing elephant. We set out on the following morning and after a few hours' march we arrived at the village of Nonai about eight miles away from our tent. The village nestled at the foot of the mountains which formed the borderland between Burma and the Shan plateau, and was inhabited by a race of people who spoke a dialect akin to Shan rather than Burmese. They lived in bamboo huts and earned their living by farming and hunting. But they were highly superstitious and when we told them of our quest they became alarmed. Sure and certain, it was the work of the irate deity who presided over the mountains and we had offended him. The harm was also to befall them for the deity was vindictive. Nevertheless the villagers received us most hospitably and when we told them of our intention to cross the hills and go in search of the elephant, they were frankly amazed. Were we mad to think of trespassing into the forbidden region of the God of the mountains? I had heard much about the activities of the Guardian of the Mountains, but I stubbornly attributed them to the superstitious nature of the villagers. Some of the villagers

swore they had actually seen the God riding on his Tiger and roaming the wilds. I pooh-poohed the idea, and laughed away their fears, but an elderly villager who looked like the headman of the village touched me on my shoulder and asked me not to be foolish. No man who had ventured into the region beyond the mountains ever returned alive. The God was powerful and revengeful and played tricks upon many an adventurous soul who was never heard of again.

My two companions were somewhat disconcerted but they gamely agreed to accompany me. I took a snap of the village with the camera that I carried and when I asked the villagers to pose for snapshot, they dispersed and remained hidden in the huts. The headman himself refused to pose. But when I requested him to keep my camera with him till I came back he very willingly agreed though he held the camera in such a manner as if he was holding something which was dangerous and loathsome. We rested the night in the village, and seeing that I remained unperturbed and very much determined to continue my quest, the headman brought a bag of rice and two cooking pots and offered them to us. The headman and some villagers saw us off as far as the forests and without even bidding us good-bye they turned their backs and fled in terror.

I was determined to get back the missing elephant, and the sight of the mountains and deep forests fanned my adventurous spirit into a flame. There were legends and old wives' tales of hidden treasures and other things in that remote region, and I was bent on seeing things for myself.

Thus we set out through wild virgin forests where age-old trees were so dense that their branches interleaved to form a sort of canopy, above us and shut out the light. Armed with a shot-gun each, we made our way cautiously through the forests. The sun was completely hidden by the trees and after what seemed to us days of trudging through the forests we emerged into an open space. I glanced at my watch and it showed two in the afternoon. The long trudge told on our hardy bodies and we voted for a rest somewhere. We walked a few miles more and when we came to another clearing looking so inviting and green after one or two showers of the coming monsoons, we decided to camp there. The site chosen was situated between two hills and a few yards away from us a little stream flowed serenely. We plunged into the stream and its cooling waters refreshed us immensely. After a meal which was neither breakfast nor dinner, we decided to explore the neighbouring regions.

Crossing the stream which we found was just knee-deep in the middle, we entered another stretch of dense forests filled with marshes. We made our way cautiously through the dense undergrowths, the thorns upon them tearing at our clothes and pricking our hands as we tore them apart to make a path for us.

It was a cloudy day and the dense forest which shut out the light was almost dark. We could scarcely see a few yards ahead of us. Leeches clung to our legs and sucked our blood, but there was no time to be lost in knocking them off our legs. The forest seemed endless and the farther we went the denser grew the forest.

We could not possibly think of retracing our steps, and hoping that we would soon be out of the forests we crept on till our aching legs began to lag and hunger gnawed within us. By the fading light we saw slimy loathsome creatures crawling in the marshes which we avoided with immense difficulty.

Growls of tigers and grunts of bears could be heard a few yards ahead of us, while above us on the trees the monkeys chattered and hid among the branches. With our guns on the ready we marced on and after what seemed an eternity we emerged from the dense forest into a kind of glade. We sat down or rather threw ourselves down under a tree and stretched our tired limbs. Then we improvised a hut built of leaves and branches and lay down to rest and pull off the leeches that clung to our bleeding legs. Then one of my companions built a fire and began to prepare our meal. It was getting dark and we could not think of going out to shoot more game. The couple of jungle fowl we had kept roasted and what remained from our last meal satisfied our hunger. We slept in our improvised hut and decided to continue our march the next morning. We slept in turns and the fire we built kept us warm and the wild beasts away. The next morning found us refreshed but hungry. I set out to look for some game, and after going a few yards from our hut I sighted a fine stag. The prospect of a good meal made me happy and taking a good aim I fired. I saw the stag fall on the spot but when I ran up to my quarry I found only a pool of blood. The stag had mysteriously disappeared. Not

being of a superstitious nature I thought of giving chase but I did not like to keep my friends waiting. So I hurried back to them and told them of my strange experience.

"Then we have come to the notorious region where they say the presiding deity of the forests spares no man." said one of the men.

I laughed away his fears, but my companions persisted in telling me that it would be wise on our part to offer our humble apologies to the irate deity and propitiate him by some offering. I refused to do anything but they took some of the cooked rice and offered to the deity asking to be forgiven for their trespass. When I suggested that we should walk farther on, they very reluctantly fell in with my idea, the bogey of the wrathful deity being too deeprooted in them. But when I told them I was going out alone they followed me. It was, however, plain from their looks that they were following me most unwillingly. We walked across the glade and reached a low hill from the top of which we saw an amazing sight that took our breath away. Amidst an open space a hill rose almost perpendicularly and unlike all other hills it was golden in colour. I had heard of the legendary golden mountain and that those lucky enough to reach the region safely could see it. The sun that peered through heavy rain clouds shone on the hill and its side glittered. We rushed towards the hill and climbed it. On its side we found large ingots of what we thought was gold, enough to make us rich beyond the dreams of avarice. We tore off our coats and in our avarice began to fill them with the gold ingots, each weighing as

much as 6 pounds. It was fantastic enough, but then we had actually got the gold with us. We descended and returned to our hut where we deposited our precious find and then returned to get some more. But our parched lips needed water and we had to look for some water. Walking to the east of the hill we came upon a brook babbling noisily, and we lay on our stomachs and drank our fill of the cool invigorating water which we found it to have a chalky taste. Disappointed, I sat down and looked about me. A few feet away from us a wild crow perched on the bank of the brook was cawing raucously and persistently, and my curiosity getting the better of me, I rose and went towards where the crow was cawing. The crow flew away frightened and as I stood on the spot my feet touched something hard in the mud, and bending down to see what it was I was amazed to find three bright red stones in the mud. I picked them up and from my knowledge of stones gained from some of the stone merchants of Mogok, I found them to very fine and flawless rubies which were enough to bring me a substantial fortune. I at once thought of the happy days ahead of me.

No more slaving in malaria-infested, God forsaken places. I thought of the happy days ahead of me and I was overjoyed. I pocketed the stones and returned to my companions to whom I showed my discovery. Surprise and superstition were in their facial expression, but they remained strangely silent. We returned to our resting place but another surprise awaited us there. The hut had disappeared and the gold ingots we had deposited were nowhere to be

found ; only our coats and the cooking pots remained to mark the site of our improvised hut. I was more irritated than disappointed and alarmed. I proposed to return to the hill and get some more gold, but this time my two companions refused to follow me and I set out alone. The hill on which we had found the gold had disappeared this time. The strange experience had some effect upon my nerves and panic seized me. I rushed back to my companions and I told them of what happened. They were frankly alarmed, and terror was writ large upon their faces. I, however consoled myself with the rubies I had in my possession and we returned. The paths made by us were nowhere to be seen. The dense forests seemed denser to us. Around us we heard the savage growls of tigers and leopards. A storm, heralded by thunder and lightning came down. Gigantic trees crashed before us and we narrowly escaped being sandwiched between the giants. The smaller trees swayed drunkenly and the wild animals scurried past us in their search for shelter. The sharp wind blowing at a high velocity whipped our coatless bodies as we rushed madly forward. The storm showed no signs of abating. One of my companions was hurt by a falling tree and he was walking with difficulty. The two men who walked behind me begged me to throw away those rubies I had in my possession. The storm raged in all its intensity and the trees swayed madly. I was hungry and disappointed. I thought of the rubies in my pockets and they gave me fresh courage. But my two companions thought that the storm was unusually severe and was caused by the God I had offended. We had

eaten nothing for some time and we felt our strength failing. The familiar landmarks were nowhere to be found and I realised that we were lost in the wilds. Staggering our way through endless forests and wading across streams in an ugly mood we made our way towards an opening we thought was somewhere.

The storm continued to rage and my two companions, with despair in their hearts almost fell upon their knees and besought me with tears in their eyes to throw away the rubies. Hunger was gnawing at my vitals and the unusual storm the like of which I had never experienced in all my life in the forests was beginning to play on my nerves. How I longed to be rich; but I was more eager to reach a village. I banished all thoughts of becoming rich at the expense of my suffering and casting a last lingering look at my rubies I cast them aside.

The man who was hurt was groaning miserably and when he saw me throw away the rubies he smiled happily. No sooner had I thrown away the rubies than the storm abated and we sighted a low hill. Summoning whatever courage and energy remained in us we staggered into the village at the foot of the hill.

It was the same village from which we had started against wiser counsel. The villagers were overjoyed to see us back alive and for three days we lay delirious and as the headman afterwards told me, we were pointing to some unseen object and asking to be forgiven.

That incident cured me of my scepticism and I at last understood why the simple villagers of that part remained so superstitious.

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN
(A Short Story)

:o:

DAWN was breaking : the dark eastern sky was suffused with pale light. The fresh morning air was laden with the scent of the many wild flowers that grew in the jungle. The jungle cock crowed the hour of dawn to the accompaniment of a loud clapping of wings which disturbed the other jungle birds roosting on the trees. The silence of the place was broken by the twittering of the birds and the loud, shrill notes of the cuckoo bird from the top of a tall htain tree.

Along the path in a clearing could be seen dimly a figure moving at leisure. As it walked along the narrow path bordered on either side by tall htain trees, a song sung in a boyish voice was heard.

Swinging a little stick and carrying across his shoulders a pole on either side of which hung a covered tray, a young boy with a top-knot emerged from the shadows and approached the stockade. He sang of the exploits of the famed King Anawratha, of his fiery spear and the battles long ago and as he approached the stockade, the wooden gates creaked on their rusty hinges and stood ajar as if in readiness to receive the early visitor. The boy walked into the stockaded village : he stood before each house and shouted in his usual way, "Alms, Please."

It was war time. The Burmans under the leadership of U Aungzeya were holding out against the invading Talaings. The village was stockaded and closely guarded and no one except the little boy who came for alms for his phongyi was allowed to leave or enter the stockade.

The sentinels who stood guard on the walls of

the stockade had become accustomed to the boyish song of the privileged little acolyte. The sound of his song in the early morning acted as the open sesame into the closed village. The boy was a little above ten years of age and he lived with his phongyi who presided over a monastery that stood a half of a mile or so from the village and across the clearing in the dense jungle.

One evening his phongyi had called him and warned him against the enemy who, it was said, had come near the village.

The little boy sat listening patiently to his spiritual master.

"Why should the enemy have come near the village?" he asked

"This is war time, don't you know?" replied the phongyi in his kindly manner. "And I want you to be careful."

"But aren't the Burmans strong enough to defeat them?" he asked again in his boyish, eager way.

"Yes, they are, but Talaings are stronger still."

Then the boy got up and lay on his mat wondering how he could help his people and those soldiers who had been so kind to him.

On that fateful day he had left earlier than it was his wont because he wanted to chat with the soldiers. The jungle birds were still asleep and the stockade was enveloped in darkness. But fearlessly the boy swung his way across the clearing and as he came nearer the village he burst into his favourite song. His eyes were on the stockade and his heart was on reaching the place and meeting the soldiers. Suddenly, rough hands seized him from behind and another hand was clapped over his mouth. His song died on his lips as he turned round and saw two

helmeted foreign-looking soldiers. He was taken to a dark place under the tall htain tree in the shadow of which moved more ghostly figures. One tall man, who looked like the officer in command emerged from another dark place and held the boy by his top-knot.

"Who are you," he demanded in a gruff voice. "I am from the phongyikyaung," replied the boy, his face drawn up under the excruciating pain he suffered from the twist given to his top-knot.

The man said something and another man seized the boy by his hand. He gave it a sudden twist and the boy winced. Tears dropped from his face and his heart beat faster. His instinct told him that he had indeed fallen into the hands of his enemies who were showing no mercy.

"We will let you go if you will do something for us," the officer began.

"What can you expect from a boy like me?" the boy told him.

"You can do a great deal for us. Now listen, go near the stockade and sing your song when I give you the signal."

The gravity of the task dawned upon his mind. The enemy had come to know that his song could open the gates of the stockade. His boyish brain worked furiously and he tried to find a way to outwit the enemy. But it would be too late. The unsuspecting soldiers on the walls seeing nothing but hearing only the familiar song would open the gates and all would be over for the Burmans.

The officer became impatient and he twisted the hand of the boy. A cry of anguish was stopped by another rough hand and the boy was helpless in the hands of the enemy.

"Come on," exclaimed the officer impatiently, "will you sing or not."

Yet the boy remained silent with his eyes fixed on the stockade.

What his thoughts at that precise moment were, it is difficult to say, but the more he looked at the stockade the more he could endure the torture he was undergoing in the hands of the enemy.

Dawn was breaking and the officer once again forced the boy to sing.

He was prodded forward by sharp swords thrust in his back and as he approached the dark stockade he burst into a song, but it was a strange song. "Enemies are coming," he sang, "and they are even now at my back."

The officer understood Burmese and with a deft stroke of his sword he cut off the head of the little hero. The blood-stained head rolled off and the headless body fell with a dull thud.

But it was too late for the enemy. The Burmans rushed out of the stockade and massacred the invaders.

U Aungzeya holding his sword stood near the place where the poor boy had died for his people. His feet touched a soft object and bending low to see what it was, he saw the headless body of the little hero.

Kneeling reverentially he picked up the body and wept over it. "Only a child," he murmured as he hugged the body, "only a child." Just then one of his leaders brought the head of the hero, the top-knot dyed red with the blood of its owner. U Aungzeya held the head high and bade all his men do homage to it.

"He is the saviour Burma," he told his men, "behold the head of the greatest hero of us all."

Greater love hath no man than than he."

To-day, in a grove on the spot where stood the old Mokesobo village can be seen a ruined tomb which belonged to the little hero.

—:—
DAWN OF TAWTHA LITERATURE
* * * * *

THE novel in any language is, perhaps, the most elastic and adaptable medium for the expression of the literary artist's feelings and thoughts.

The Burmese novel was still in the making, though it has long passed that stage when the writers fed the readers with nothing else but soft sentimentality and unwholesome absurdities.

Novels opening with such things as "when Phoebus has just driven his chariot towards the Western Island, the red and dark and glimmering clouds roll along," etc. have long disappeared, and the almost irresistible tendency on the part of the authors to have graduates as heroes and daughters of well-to-do parents as heroines has been showing a decline, and better writers with modernised outlook and experience have now turned to the under-dog, that important personage "The Tawtha," and these writers are more attentive to technique and characterisation than to pander to the jaded taste of the readers. Sentimental and absurd novels are still read and appreciated by a section of the reading public, while the other section gets sick of such novels.

The slow development of the Burmese novel was to be attributed more to the low taste of the readers than to the writers some of whom, scarcely earned enough from the novels they turned out before the war.

The novel requires dramatic construction and

the author has to work out his characters and incidents with a wealth of detail. This ability brings out the personality of the author. Turning to English literature, we notice that by good characterisation, Dickens has the opportunity to reveal his humour just as Thackeray's style is clearly seen.

The recent prolific output of popular fiction and popular journalism makes it difficult for an author to satisfy his own standard of literary taste. All he is concerned about is to make a popular appeal, and this means pandering to the taste of the readers.

If more advanced and highbrow novels of a high standard are to be expected, the taste of the reading public must be reformed.

In my experience as a reviewer as well as an author, I have come across some striking Burmese novels, but they all, invariably, treated of the same stale sickening love themes.

But two outstanding Burmese novels are worth mentioning in detail.

"**Ei-Lu Bone**" by Mya Myo Lwin published in 1938 is a novel that breaks away from the conventional type and theme. It is a very unconventional novel inasmuch as it portrays a delightful village and its inhabitants unspoiled by urban conventions and its artificiality.

By his superb characterisation, Mya Myo Lwin reveals flashes of his quiet and subtle humour and his understanding of the "Taw-tha." He is inclined to be Utopian at times, but never absurd.

But in "**Wathone-Ei-Mye**" by Mya Daung Nyo, we find the Burmese novel upon a totally different phase of its development. It is a "proletarian novel," not Utopian, not muck-raking, not

satirical but honest and straightforward.

There is a Socialist and Reformer behind every line in the novel and each character is a perfect type of the under-dog "Tawtha."

Though adapted from "The Good Earth" it is more than an adaptation, the author's originality being transparently revealed throughout its pages.

The struggle of men against nature, their ultimate triumphs and failures are absorbingly told with the author's original narrative powers. But running like an interminable thread through the whole book is the author's understanding sympathy for the "Taw-tha." His "**Tha-choe**" is, perhaps, the most lovable character so far created, and we rejoice with him in his little joys and sympathise with him in his sorrows and struggles.

He is a perfect prototype of the downtrodden and misunderstood Burmese peasant, but the author has endowed him with a glow that turns him into both a hero and a martyr.

We have had enough of sentiment and absurdities. There are problems in our lives, which are as alive as ever. They remain to be solved, and to solve them, we must have reality of which we are a part.

To seek is to find, even though we may be unconscious of it, and how easier will our problems be if our intellect is upon real things and not upon stale sentimentality the product of decadent imagination and taste.

The Burmese Novel has a function to perform and novels like '**Ei-Lu-Bone**' and "**Watone-Eimye**" are the harbingers of better and greater works.

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